

Minutes of Forum Meeting 20 November 2009

Present: 17

Apologies: 9

Introductions

Catherine welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked them to introduce themselves.

Cindy Fayenfunmi from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

What is the Crown Prosecution Service?

Cindy is the Community Prosecution Officer for the CPS; the CPS's role is to:

- Engage with the community
- Raise awareness about the CPS and improve people's confidence in it
- Give victims confidence to report crime
- Work in partnership with other teams, e.g. the police, courts etc.

The CPS is a civil service designed to be close to the community that it serves, there are 32 boroughs in London. Its role is to advise the police about making prosecutions, for example making sure that the police have enough evidence to take the case to court.

If the CPS think there is enough evidence or grounds to prosecute someone they will go to court to prosecute the defendant.

The CPS decides if someone should be prosecuted by basing their decision on 'The code' this is a list of guidelines to help them assess if a crime should go to court. The decision will depend on whether there is enough evidence and whether it is in the public's interest to prosecute.

Cindy's role is to learn more about Hackney's community to know what is in the public interest. She can then inform Hackney's CPS about the issues that they should push for prosecution.

For example, many disabled people do not report crime so the CPS does not know what issues are most common in Hackney. By meeting with the local community, the CPS is able to understand and learn about the key issues and problems in Hackney and then prosecute effectively.

Disability Hate Crime

A hate incident is something that may or may not be a criminal offence.

It's something that you perceive to be a hate incident, for example the offender is directly doing something because of your disability.

Even if it is not a criminal offence, if you tell the police they have to log it as a hate incident and it will be kept on file, it's very important to report incidents so the police can monitor what's happening.

Law

An important law came into act in April 2005 which places a duty on court to increase the sentence of any offence which was based on the victim's disability.

It has to be proved that the incident was related directly to the victim's disability,

For example someone stole your bag you couldn't prove that it was because you were disabled, your disability might have made it easier but that was not the motivation behind the act. If the person said, 'you're disabled so I want your bag' or makes it clear that they are acting against you because of your disability then that is a disability incident and the persons sentence would be increased.

What can I do?

It is really important that disabled people feel safe and confident to report crime.

Each ward in Hackney has a Safer Neighbourhood office where you can meet your local neighbourhood officers.

Cindy encouraged everyone to talk to their local neighbourhood officer about their experiences of crime. If we work together we can reduce the instances of disability hate crime.

Domestic Violence

Sybell works for the CPS and specialises in cases relating to domestic violence.

Domestic violence is any incident or threatening behaviour or abuse between persons who have been connected in some way, for example family members, partners, housemates.

Domestic violence is abuse and is not always physical. Abuse could be sexual, physical, emotional or financial, for example controlling someone's money, saying hurtful things, inappropriate touching or force.

Many cases of disability hate crime or domestic violence are carried out by people who know or are close to the victim. This can make people scared to report it.

If a victim reports domestic violence, the perpetrator may be arrested and the victim would have to give evidence.

There are many support groups in Hackney, like the NIA project. They help women who are at high risk of domestic violence.

If a victim has to go to court, there are lots of things that the CPS and the court can do to protect them, for example having a screen between you and the perpetrator or giving evidence by video. Sometimes there may be enough evidence, like CCTV, 999 call made to police which means the victim wouldn't need to give evidence as the defendant would plead guilty.

Restraining Orders

Restraining orders are a way of stopping someone coming too close to the victim. If someone reported domestic violence or harassment then the perpetrator could be given a restraining order stopping them from being within 500 meters of the victim. This distance changes depending on the case.

The law was changed recently so it doesn't have to be an act of harassment, it can be any element of harassment.

If the restraining order was placed against an ex partner or someone close you could have the order revoked.

Reporting Crime

Cindy asked Disability Backup member if they had been victims of crime, many said that they had been victims of minor crimes but rarely bothered to report it.

Many people thought that the police would not be interested in minor crimes like freedom pass theft.

Cindy emphasised the importance of reporting crime, it is important that the police have an idea of what is happening in the borough, for example mobile phone theft. They may not be able to convict but they will have an idea of the frequency and type of theft that is happening.

Reporting crime helps the police to understand if certain patterns are emerging or if certain members of the public are being targeted.

Cindy asked the group if they had ever met their Safer Neighbourhood teams. Not everybody had heard of these teams, they are based in every ward in Hackney to serve that area of the community, to walk the streets and to get to know the local residents.

Action points

- Catherine to gather questionnaire responses to give to Cindy
- The next newsletter to feature information of local Safer Neighbourhood teams
- Disability Backup Members to ensure they report crime however small.

The meeting ended.